

Unfolding Cultural Resources at Shenandoah

Shenandoah National Park is well known for its scenic beauty and serene places which are perfect for quiet contemplation. The park preserves another valuable resource, however, which is perhaps less familiar. Within the boundaries of Shenandoah National Park there are items which can unlock the mysteries of the park's past and help in the continuing effort to protect and preserve the timeless beauty of the Blue Ridge section of the Appalachian Mountains. These keys to the park's past and future take many forms, were created by many individuals and organizations, and were produced over a period of time ranging from the early-19th-century to the current day. These items are none other than the many hundreds of linear feet of archival materials held by the park. As is the case with all National Park Service sites, Shenandoah National Park holds invaluable yet little-known resources in the form of letters, manuscripts, photographs, plans and drawings, maps, newspapers, reports, and other documentary artifacts. This article will outline the various documentary resources at Shenandoah National Park and discuss the recent efforts to manage and provide greater access to those materials.

There is inherent value in any archives: documentary records are the stuff of which history is made. Historians use documents to peer into past events, people, and societies. At Shenandoah National Park, the value of documentary artifacts is as genuine as at any institution whose mission is to preserve our natural and cultural resources. Documentary materials at Shenandoah National Park include primary resources reflective of the cultural activities of the Blue Ridge segment of the Appalachian Mountains with emphasis on the farming and rural communities which developed on the mountains. Shenandoah National Park archival materials also document the efforts of the individuals and government agencies responsible for the establishment of the park, in part by moving into the area at the beginning of the 20th century and relocating the mountain inhabitants. The archives illuminate as well the process of administering the park from its inception to the current day.

The archival materials at Shenandoah National Park, as at all National Park Service sites, fall into two broad categories: 1) Official National

Park Service Records, which comprise the official record of the National Park Service and are managed according to NPS-19, *Records Management Guideline*, and 2) Museum Archival and Manuscript Collections (non-official records), which, as stated in NPS-28, *Cultural Resource Management Guideline*, Release No. 4 (September 1994), include "... all types of documentary records that contribute substantially to the understanding, interpretation, and management of other park resources (cultural and natural) as well as being important resources in their own right." This latter category is managed as part of the museum collection, including accessioning, processing, rehousing, describing, cataloging, and providing access for research. Museum Archival and Manuscript Collections (non-official records) are further divided into personal papers, organizational archives (acquired archives), and resource management records. Shenandoah National Park's museum archives fall into all of these categories.

The personal papers at Shenandoah National Park include small groups of documents which illustrate the lives of mountain families primarily during their latter years within what is now park boundaries. These materials include letters, photographs, newspaper articles, and other documents which remain unprocessed and uncataloged. The most complete and significant collection of personal papers are the *L. Ferdinand Zerkel Papers, 1818-1960*. This collection comprises approximately 12.0 linear feet and documents the activities of Mr. Zerkel, a Luray, Virginia, businessman who was instrumental in the formation of Shenandoah National Park. The collection includes scrapbooks; loose-leaf binders of donation records and newspaper clippings; typed, handwritten, and carbon copies of letters; reports; pamphlets; drawings/blueprints; maps; photographs; clippings and newspapers; and electrostatic copies. Included also are the receipts from the auction sale of objects from Zerkel's Luray Museum. Zerkel's papers fall into the following categories: I. Correspondence, II. Subject Files, III. Clippings and Newspapers, IV. Scrapbooks, V. Photographs and Negatives, VI. Books, VII. Receipts, and VIII. Oversize Items. The Zerkel papers were donated to the park in July 1962 pursuant to the provisions of his will. From the beginning, the Zerkel papers have been recognized as one of the park's most valuable resources, as evidenced in an August 1962 letter from the park superintendent to the Zerkel children which states: "Your father and mother donated to the National Park Service a collection of historical documents, maps, papers, and photographs relating to the early history and establishment of the Shenandoah National Park. These historical documents will be invaluable to the Park, and I am sure will serve as our best source material on the early days of this

area." Zerkel's papers currently are unprocessed and cataloged.

Of compelling significance are the various collections of organizational archives at Shenandoah National Park. Currently identified collections fall into three groups: materials relating to Christian ministry at the park, records of Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) activities, and original land acquisition documents. The Christian ministry materials, which currently are unprocessed and uncataloged, include correspondence, financial records, programs, and newspaper clippings documenting a movement in the 1960s to provide Christian ministry and outreach in a national park setting. The organization is known as A Christian Ministry in the National Parks. The documents relating to CCC activities are currently unprocessed and uncataloged and range in date from the mid-1930s to the mid-1980s. The park holds plans and drawings, photographs, correspondence, and general files documenting the CCC's activities at Shenandoah National Park and continues to receive donations from former CCC workers. These files are a particularly rich source of information on the early development of the park.

One of the largest and most valuable collections at Shenandoah National Park are the *State Commission on Conservation and Development Land Records, 1869-1995*. These land acquisition files encompass an estimated 50.0 linear feet and document the process by which land was acquired by Shenandoah National Park. Although Congress authorized the establishment of Shenandoah National Park in 1926, the legislative body stipulated that land be acquired by donation without expenditure of any federal funds. During the next 10 years some private citizens donated land to the government. The bulk of the land, however, was purchased by Virginia through the State Commission on Conservation and Development, either from willing sellers or by condemnation and purchase. This land was then donated to the federal government. The *State Commission on Conservation and Development Land Records, 1869-1995* were processed and cataloged during a FY96 project funded through the Backlog Cataloging Program and carried out by staff of Shenandoah National Park and the Northeast Museum Services Center (comprised of National Park Service staff and catalogers from the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities working through a cooperative agreement with the National Park Service). Staff from the Northeast Museum Services Center organized the files into five series: I. Tract Files by County, II. Boundary Survey Files, III. Notices to Vacate, IV. Computation Sheets for Boundary Surveys, and V. Oversize Storage; cataloged the collection into the Automated National Catalog System; and created a finding aid which includes a description of the collection, a collection

listing, a tract number index, and a landowner index.

Shenandoah National Park also holds a rich collection of records which were produced by park employees and which provide evidence of various aspects of the planning, development, and history of the park. A large number of files are classified as "Resource Management Records" and consequently are managed as part of the park's museum collection. These files document efforts of the park to manage its cultural and natural resources and are continually used by park staff in the ongoing management of the park. Of particular interest are photograph albums which depict persons, events, sites, and structures associated with Shenandoah National Park; the park's drawings and master plans relating to the development of the park; records produced from geological, wildlife, meteorological, and archeological studies; research on various topics such as Shenandoah National Park place names; and oral histories. Most of the park's resource management records remain unprocessed and uncataloged.

Although most of Shenandoah National Park's archival collections are unprocessed and uncataloged, there has been progress in recent years. The land acquisition files, as described above, were cataloged during a FY96 project funded out of the Backlog Cataloging Program. The park has continued to receive support from this program. During the current fiscal year, the Zerkel papers and a portion of the park's resource management records will be processed and cataloged. In future years, the remainder of the collections will be processed, with the ultimate goal that each collection will have a catalog card and finding aid, the entire collection will be described in a general guide to all the archival materials at the park, and all of this data will be presented to the public through the World Wide Web or by a similar method. With each step in this process, the park comes closer to providing the public with access to invaluable resources which illuminate the creation of one of our most beautiful national parks.

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